

Eight Noble Beings

This division is associated with the ten ‘fetters’ (*saṃyojana*), which are abandoned at different levels of awakening, and with the development of the threefold training (*sikkhā*) of moral conduct, concentration and wisdom. The ten fetters are those defilements that bind beings to suffering in the round of rebirth, similar to yokes that bind an animal to a wagon:¹

A. Five lower fetters (*orambhāgiya-saṃyojana*):

1. *Sakkāya-diṭṭhi*: self-view; the firm belief in a ‘self’; the inability to see that beings are simply a collection of assorted aggregates. This view creates a coarse form of selfishness, as well as conflict and suffering.²
2. *Vicikicchā*: doubt; hesitation; distrust. Doubts, for example, regarding the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Sangha, the training, the direction of one’s life, and Dependent Origination.* This doubt generates a lack of confidence, courage and discernment in walking the Noble Path.
3. *Sīlabbata-parāmāsa*: attachment to moral precepts and religious practices. Attachment to form and ceremony. The mistaken understanding that one will be purified and liberated merely by the act of keeping moral precepts, rules, traditions, and practices. The belief that these rules and practices are sacred in themselves. One follows them with the desire for reward or acquisition. Missing the true purpose of moral precepts and religious observances, one ends up astray or in an extreme form of practice (say of practising extreme asceticism—*tapā*), not on the Noble Path.³
4. *Kāma-rāga*: sensual lust; desire for pleasurable sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile objects.
5. *Paṭigha*: animosity; irritation; indignation.

*Dependent Origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*): the simplest formulation of Dependent Origination is: *When this exists, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises. When this does not exist, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases* (S. II. 28, 65). See the translation of Chapter 4 of *Buddhadhamma*: ‘Dependent Origination: The Buddhist Law of Conditionality’ (© 2012).

B. Five higher fetters (*uddhambhāgiya-saṃyojana*):

6. *Rūpa-rāga*: attachment to fine-material form, e.g., attachment to the four ‘jhānas’* of the fine-material sphere; delighting in the bliss and peace of these jhānas; desiring the fine-material sphere (*rūpa-bhava*).
7. *Arūpa-rāga*: attachment to immateriality, e.g., attachment to the four immaterial jhānas; desire for the formless sphere (*arūpa-bhava*).

8. *Māna*: conceit; the view of oneself as superior, equal or inferior to others.
9. *Uddhacca*: restlessness; mental disturbance; agitation.
10. *Avijjā*: ignorance; not knowing the truth; not knowing the law of cause and effect; not knowing the Four Noble Truths. {409}

**Jhāna*: concentrative absorption.

The eight *dakkhiṇeyya-puggala* or *ariya-puggala* can be classified into four types or stages, which are related to the fetters in the following way:⁴

A. *Sekha* ('learners') or *sa-upādisesa-puggala* ('those who still have grasping'):

1. *Sotāpanna*: 'stream-enterers'; those who walk the noble path truly and correctly.⁵ They have perfect moral conduct and an adequate level of concentration and wisdom. They have abandoned the first three fetters of *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*, *vicikicchā* and *sīlabata-parāmāsa*.⁶
2. *Sakadāgāmi*: 'once-returners'; those who will return to this world one more time and eliminate all suffering. They have perfect moral conduct and an adequate level of concentration and wisdom. Apart from abandoning the first three fetters, they have attenuated greed, hatred and delusion to a greater degree than stream-enterers.⁷
3. *Anāgāmi*: 'non-returners'; they reach final enlightenment from the realm where they appear after death—they do not return to this world. They have perfect moral conduct and concentration, and an adequate level of wisdom. They have abandoned two more fetters, of *kāma-rāga* and *paṭigha*, thus abandoning the first five fetters.

B. *Asekha* ('those who have finished training') or *anupādisesa-puggala* ('those with no grasping'):

4. *Arahant*: 'worthy ones'; those worthy of offerings and respect; those who have broken the spokes of the wheel of *saṃsāra*; those free from mental taints (*āsava*). They have perfect moral conduct, concentration and wisdom. They have abandoned the remaining five fetters, thus abandoning all ten fetters.

Sekha, translated as 'learners' or 'trainees,' must apply themselves to sever the fetters and realize the gradual stages up to arahantship. *Asekha*, the arahants, are adepts; they have gone beyond training. They have finished their spiritual work and eradicated all defilements. They have reached the greatest good; there is no higher spiritual realization for which to strive.

Sa-upādisesa-puggala are equivalent to the first three *dakkhiṇeyya-puggala* above. They still have *upādi* ('fuel'), that is, they still have *upādāna* ('grasping')—they still have mental impurities. *Anupādisesa-puggala*, the arahants, are free from grasping and impurity. Note that *upādi* here is translated as synonymous with *upādāna* ('grasping').⁸ This differs from the *upādi* in *sa-upādisesa-nibbāna* and *anupādisesa-nibbāna*, which translates as 'that which is grasped,' i.e., the five aggregates.* {410} The equating of *upādi* with *upādāna* corresponds with the Buddha's teachings on essential spiritual factors, for example the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (*sati-paṭṭhāna*), the Four Ways of Success (*iddhi-pāda*), and the Five Faculties (*indriya*), which often end with the encouragement that one can expect one of two results from cultivating these factors: either arahantship in this very life, or if there is a residue of clinging, the state of non-returning.⁹ The term *upādi* in these contexts refers to *upādāna* or generally to mental defilement (*kilesa*).

*The five aggregates (*khandha*): physical form (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), volitional formations (*saṅkhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*). In the Buddhist teachings these five components are all that make up the mind-body unity of a human being. Indeed, they constitute all worldly things.

The eight noble beings are precisely these four *ariya-puggala* described above, but each level of awakening is subdivided as a pair:¹⁰

1. Stream-enterer (one who has realized the fruit of stream-entry).
2. One practising to realize stream-entry.
3. Once-returner (one who has realized the fruit of once-returning).
4. One practising to realize once-returning.
5. Non-returner (one who has realized the fruit of non-returning).
6. One practising to realize non-returning.
7. Arahant (one who has realized the fruit of arahantship).
8. One practising to realize arahantship.¹¹

These four pairs of noble beings are known as the *sāvaka-saṅgha*, the disciples of the Buddha who are considered exemplary human beings and comprise one of the three 'jewels' (*ratana*) in Buddhism. The chant in praise of the Sangha includes: 'The four pairs, the eight kinds of noble beings; these are the Blessed One's disciples' (*yadidaṃ cattāri purisayugāni aṭṭha purisapuggalā esa bhagavato sāvaka-saṅgho*).¹²

In the scriptures, these disciples of the Buddha are later referred to as the 'noble *saṅgha*' (*ariya-saṅgha*). In the older texts, the term *ariya-saṅgha* is used only once as a synonym for *sāvaka-saṅgha*, in a verse of the Aṅguttara-Nikāya.¹³ In the commentaries it is used frequently, especially in the Visuddhimagga.¹⁴ When the term *ariya-saṅgha* gained popularity over *sāvaka-saṅgha*, the term *sammatti-saṅgha*

was used to refer to the *bhikkhu-saṅgha*. *Sammati-saṅgha* means the agreed-upon or authorized sangha, referring to any gathering of more than three bhikkhus. These terms are often paired: *sāvaka-saṅgha* with *bhikkhu-saṅgha*, and *ariya-saṅgha* with *sammati-saṅgha*. In any case the terms *ariya-saṅgha* and *sammati-saṅgha* do not contradict the older terms and offer a valuable perspective on the meaning of the word ‘sangha.’ {411}

Noble Beings (<i>dakkiṇeyya-puggala</i>)	Training (<i>sikkhā</i>)	Fetters (<i>saṃyojana</i>) Abandoned
1. Stream-enterer	Perfect moral conduct; proficient level of concentration and wisdom.	1. <i>Sakkāya-ditṭhi</i> 2. <i>Vicikicchā</i> 3. <i>Sīlabbata-parāmāsa</i>
2. Once-returner	Perfect moral conduct; proficient level of concentration and wisdom.	Attenuated greed, hatred and delusion.
3. Non-returner	Perfect moral conduct and concentration; proficient level of wisdom.	4. <i>Kāma-rāga</i> 5. <i>Paṭigha</i>
4. Arahant	Perfect moral conduct, concentration and wisdom.	6. <i>Rūpa-rāga</i> 7. <i>Arūpa-rāga</i> 8. <i>Māna</i> 9. <i>Uddhacca</i> 10. <i>Avijjā</i>

- ¹ E.g.: S. V. 61; A. V. 17; Vbh. 377; DA. I. 312. In the Pali Canon the fourth and fifth fetters are *kāma-chanda* and *byāpāda* respectively, except for A. I. 242, where one finds *abhijjhā* and *byāpāda*. The familiar pair of *kāma-rāga* and *paṭigha* comes from secondary texts and sub-commentaries, e.g.: Ps2. 94; Vism. 683; Comp.: Samuccayaparicchedo, Akusalasaṅgaho.
- ² The stock definition is: *One regards material form as self, or self as possessed of material form, or material form as in self, or self as in material form. One regards feeling as self.... One regards perception as self.... One regards volitional formations as self.... One regards consciousness as self ... or self as in consciousness.* See: M. I. 300; S. IV. 287; Dhs. 182-3; Vbh. 364.
- ³ See Appendix 1 on *sīlabbata-parāmāsa*.
- ⁴ The two *dakkhiṇeyya* of *sekha* and *asekha*: A. I. 63, 231-2. The four *dakkhiṇeyya* or *ariya-puggala* (in some places referred to by other names or by no name at all): e.g., D. I. 156; D. II. 251-2; D. III. 107, 132; M. III. 80-1; Pug. 63. At A. IV. 279-80 stream-enterers are divided into three types and non-returners into five types; combined with once-returners, this makes nine types of *sa-upādisesa-puggala*.
- ⁵ See S. V. 347-8.
- ⁶ A. III. 438 states that stream-enterers are also free from (acute) greed, hatred and delusion, which lead to states of woe (*apāya*).
- ⁷ Ps. II. 94-5 states that once-returners have abandoned the fetters of coarse lust and animosity, and that non-returners have abandoned subtle lust and animosity. The Visuddhimagga states that once-returners have reduced lust and aversion (676-7). All of these interpretations are complementary.
- ⁸ This translation follows the commentarial interpretation, e.g. AA. IV. 40, 174.
- ⁹ *Diṭṭheva dhamme aññā sati vā upādisese anāgāmitā*. D. II. 314; M. I. 62, 481; S. V. 129, 237, 285; A. III. 81-2, 143; A. V. 108; It. 39; Sn. 140, 148. Explained in the commentaries: e.g. ItA. I. 169; SnA. II. 503.
- ¹⁰ D. III. 255; A. IV. 292. The Abhidhamma divides these eight into two groups: *magga-samaṅgī*, complete in the Path, and *phala-samaṅgī*, complete in the fruits of the Path (Pug. 73).
- ¹¹ These days one finds the translation of these pairs as ‘fruition of stream-entry’ (*sotāpatti-phala*), ‘path of stream-entry’ (*sotāpatti-magga*), ‘fruition of once-returning’ (*sakadāgāmi-phala*), ‘path of once-returning’ (*sakadāgāmi-magga*), etc. This translation follows commentarial terminology: for *maggatṭha* & *phalaṭṭha* see Nd1A. II. 254; Nd2A. 15; KhA. 183; DhA. I. 334; VinṬ.: Pārājikakaṇḍam, Bhikkhupadabhājanīya-vaṇṇanā; DA. II. 515 = AA. IV. 3 = PañcA. 191; MA. II. 120; UdA. 306. The terms *sotāpatti-magga*, *sakadāgāmi-magga* and *anāgāmi-magga* do not appear in the older texts of the Tipiṭaka; they first appear in the Niddesa, Paṭisambhidāmagga and the Abhidhamma. In the older texts, the term *arahatta-magga* is only found in the passages: *arahā vā assasi arahattamaggaṃ vā samāpanno* and *arahanto vā arahattamaggaṃ vā samāpannā*: Vin. I. 32, 39; D. I. 144; S. I. 78; A. II. 42; A. III. 391; Ud. 7, 65. In later texts, e.g., the Niddesa, Paṭisambhidāmagga and the Abhidhamma, it is extensively used.
- ¹² E.g. M. I. 37; A. III. 286.
- ¹³ A. III. 373.
- ¹⁴ E.g. Vism. 218; VinṬ.: Paṭhamo Bhāgo, Ganthārambhakathā-vaṇṇanā.